

One arm pullup training

One arm pullups are an impressive feat of strength, and take a lot of dedicated training to work up to. You don't need any specialized equipment, either – just your own bodyweight, knowledge of progressive principles and exercises, and a horizontal bar. Progressive calisthenics, a strength oriented approach to bodyweight training, focuses on minimalism – little to no equipment, but high rewards. Your body is its own very versatile form of training equipment!

With all of this in mind, let's explore how to work towards one arm pullups. Firstly, I'll recommend two books and a certification that are invaluable for calisthenics enthusiasts, martial artists, and coaches. Secondly, starting on the next page is a description of a useful strength training method as well as my own progression towards them. Lastly is a potential progression.

The first Convict Conditioning book – which sparked the resurgence of interest in progressive calisthenics - has an amazing progression for pullups, which helps lay out a plan for training towards one arm pullups.

For a lot more information about progression in calisthenics, check out the other articles further along in this guide. Don't forget to also check out my “Street Workouts” video playlist on YouTube for video tutorials on a lot of the exercises mentioned in this article, and much more! To view this and other playlists, head to my calisthenics page and click on “Bodyweight training videos”. If you are visiting the mobile version of the site, you can find a link to the site menu in the top post.

<http://www.strengthcalisthenics.com>

My progress towards the one arm pullup, a useful training method, and a sample progression

- Met the Convict Conditioning progression standard for uneven pullups (step 7 in the pullup progression).

- Improved form and reps for bar and towel pullups, which are essentially a form of self-assisted pullups. Bar and towel pullups are similar to assisted one arm pullups (step 9 in the progression), but you do not let go of the towel in the top half of the movement.

- Had trouble breaking into 1/2 one arm pullups, though, so I started working on the weighted pullup progression in Steven Low's book “Overcoming Gravity”.

However, Paul "Coach" Wade, author of the Convict Conditioning books, frowns upon the use of weight vests. His argument - which I tend to agree with – is as follows.

“They are worse than useless for bodyweight; the screw up form, they can cause aching joints, and they never seem to do what they are supposed to--get folks up the next progression! You are far better finding progressive "hidden steps" in your training.”

Coach brought this up when I posted a question in the comments section in one of his articles, which details his own methods and that of his mentor Joe Hartigen, which I have since been applying to training towards one arm pullups.

Article - <http://pccblog.dragondoor.com/the-bodyweight-revolution/>

The Hartigen Method, as Wade calls it, is a 5/4/3/2/1 "ladder" protocol wherein you choose the hardest exercise you can perform for 5 quality reps. Hartigen would often warmup with an easier exercise, for two sets of 5, using slow, dynamic tension to add to the difficulty. What I like about the Hartigen method is the built-in "hidden steps" and tougheners, such as the dynamic tension!

The final work set would often include - "...a ten second dynamic-tension isometric at the top position of that very last rep. He'd follow this with a slow negative of about ten seconds."

I began training the pullup progression as strictly as possible while applying the Hartigen method. The lower rep counts, as well as the dynamic tension and slow eccentric on the last rep, allow one to focus like a laser on form and milk all the strength gains possible out of these techniques. I was eventually able to perform uneven pullups with good form with Joe's system.

*Note – there are others who do agree with the use of weight vests. The argument that could be made for them is that they are an easy way to add intensity to a movement pattern that is already ingrained, and that you can still monitor form if you are strict about it. It is recommended to review the section on training for levels 7 and 8 in Overcoming Gravity. The caution here is that if you're not near level 7 or 8 in your ability, you shouldn't use a weight vest until you have worked through other progressions as needed. (Such as the progressions for rowing, pullups, and pullups on rings + one arm chinups in Overcoming Gravity.)

-I applied a 5x5 scheme to Commando pullups, then revisited uneven pullups using the Hartigen method. I eventually progressed to applying this method to Archer pullups. Over time I tightened up form and built up to the full 10 seconds of dynamic tension and the 10 second eccentric at the end.

-I started working self-assisted one arm pullups using a "grease the groove" cycle. Grease the groove is a protocol that essentially involves frequently practicing an exercise while "fresh", and never going to fatigue when you practice. I had slow but steady progress with this. Although I list this exercise after jackknife (feet elevated) one arm pullups in the progression in the next page, "regressed" self-assisted OAPUs can be easier than jackknives. Jackknives are the first fully unilateral movement in the progression, which represents quite a hike in strength requirement. Athletes who aren't quite ready for this can use self-assistance methods to "regress" a movement and make progress. Some athletes may not even decide to use jackknife OAPUs at all. I kept the assisting arm high at first and gradually worked up to having it at nearly a 90 degree angle to my working arm.

-Short "grease the groove" cycle with Jackknife OAPUs. For some reps, I utilized a minor amount of self-assistance – placing my free hand at a deep angle to my working arm on whatever vertical base was available, and only pushing through the concentric sticking point.

-I began working self-assisted OAPUs again, once a week. I also started working with slow self-assisted one arm eccentrics & flex hangs. The goal is to perform these without assistance.

-I began working an Australian pullup progression twice a week, up to Archer Australian pullups and one arm Australian pullups, plus horizontal hangs & negatives without assistance.

-After that, I will revisit Jackknife OAPUs without support from the "off hand". At first I will be using a regression – keeping the knees bent so that the legs may provide a little extra support. I will also continue working vertical one arms hangs and negatives once a week, as well as the Australian pullup progression twice a week.

-Next, I will revisit self-assisted one arm pullups and the tougheners. The goals are to perform self assisted pullups as described in step 9 of the pullup progression in Convict Conditioning, then to build up to the progression standard. After this, I will work on gradually decreasing self assistance until I can finally nail a OAPU!

Essentially, the Convict Conditioning pullup progression is still very solid, but for most trainees, will require extra steps between Steps 7 and 8 in the progression, as well as between Steps 8 and 9. Below I list a potential progression, with tougheners for some of the exercises. I am not dogmatic about this approach. You're encouraged to add other steps as needed, and you don't have to use all of the steps below, or work with only one at a time. Explore and experiment! It may even be a good idea to split horizontal pullups into their own progression, leading to one arm Australian pullups or even harder variations (such as torquers). Such a progression could include archer Australian pullups, close grip Australian pullups, and more.

1. Vertical / straight pullups
2. Angled pullups
3. Table pullups
4. Australian pullups
5. Jackknife pullups (feet elevated; lower base makes it easier)
6. Pullups
7. Close grip pullups (over time, bringing the hands closer together)
8. Commando pullups (over time, putting assisting arm further from working arm)
9. Uneven pullups (over time, putting assisting hand lower on working arm)
10. Around the worlds
11. Archer pullups
12. Jackknife one arm pullups

*Feet elevated. To make the exercise easier: bend the knees during the exercise, and/or use a lower base. Tougheners: keep the legs straight during the exercise, and or use a higher base for your feet to push down on (up to having the legs to form a right angle to your torso).

13. Partner assisted one arm pullups

*To make the exercise easier: your partner can push harder. Toughener: Instruct your partner to only push through the concentric sticking point or when your movement starts to slow down. Make sure you have good communication with your partner to insure safety. However, if you feel you need too much assistance with this exercise, go back to jackknife OAPUs.

14. Self-assisted one arm pullups

*Hold on to a vertical base with your free hand (such as the vertical pole of a pullup unit). Keeping the assisting hand closer to you makes it easier to push downwards, as does keeping it higher. Tougheners: Lowering the assisting arm and/or keeping it further from you; only push through the concentric sticking point with the assisting arm; use a towel or rope for self-assistance, since either would be an unstable "base" to push downwards on; keeping an L-hold position with the legs during the exercise.

15. One arm pullups

*Kicking up with the legs makes this easier, but using little to no momentum (keeping the knees locked and legs immobile) will make it harder.